

[By Neal Goswami](#)

Vermont officials are hailing a new savings plan the U.S. Postal Service announced Thursday that will keep open the mail processing facility in White River Junction.

Revamped plan

Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe revealed a revamped plan aimed at reducing costs for the cash-strapped postal service. Officials announced last year that it was planning to close more than 250 mail processing centers and as many as 15,000 post offices as part of an overall plan to save about \$20 billion a year.

The two processing plants in Vermont in White River Junction and Essex Junction were both slated close. The USPS announced in February that it would keep the Essex Junction plant open, but had been moving forward with plans to close White River Junction.

Last week the USPS announced that the post offices slated to close, most in rural areas, would remain open but have reduced operating hours.

Donahoe said in a conference call with reporters Thursday that about 100 of the sorting facilities set to be closed would remain open and continue to offer timely first-class mail delivery. The facilities that will remain open will be reviewed again in 2014.

Donahoe said the new plan was developed after input from customers. Many of the facilities must still close, he said, to reduce costs and keep mail costs reasonable.

"We've been very responsible, very aggressive," he said. "We've done it very methodically and in a responsible way."

Megan Brennan, the USPS's chief operating officer, said a major decline in the volume of first-class mail requires a reduction in sorting facilities. Volume has fallen by 25 percent since 2006, according to Brennan, and is projected to decline another 40 percent by 2020.

"The sobering reality is that the first class mail loss will not return," she said.

A reduction in sorting facilities has already begun. There were 673 across the country in 2006, according to Brennan. There will be 232 by 2015 under the new plan.

"The postal service is proceeding with necessary consolidation of postal facilities," she said. "People prefer consolidation if it means we can keep mail affordable."

The consolidation will save \$2.1 billion annually when fully implemented, Brennan said. "It's an important part of returning the postal service to long-term financial stability," she said.

Vermont's congressional delegation, which has pushed for keeping the White River Junction facility open, praised the announcement.

"This is great news for the 245 employees at the White River Junction plant and every Vermonter who relies on the Postal Service to deliver their mail on time, especially small businesses and the elderly. It shows that when unions, customers and small businesses speak out their voices can be heard and their opinions matter. This process has been a lesson in democracy at its best," independent U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders said.

U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, a Democrat, said the decision will ensure delivery standards that

Vermonters are accustomed to.

"I am relieved that the postmaster general will keep the mail processing facility at White River Junction open. This facility is critical to local mail delivery standards in our area, and keeping it open is the right decision for our state and for USPS overall. The Postal Service's future must be forged through better customer service, not by endangering service and performance," Leahy said.

Congressman Peter Welch and Gov. Peter Shumlin, both Democrats, noted the impact on jobs and local economies the new USPS plan will have in Vermont.

"This is great news for the hard-working employees at White River Junction and all Vermonters. The Postal Service has a vital mission to serve all Americans regardless of where they live. Today's announcement reaffirms that mission, ensuring Vermonters will continue to receive reliable, timely service," Welch said.

"Today's good news that the processing plant will remain open, preserving more than 200 jobs, shows that the U.S. Postal Service listened to the hundreds of Vermonters and New Hampshire residents who stepped forward to protest the potential closure," Shumlin said. "Post offices and processing facilities are critical to local economies, rural communities and the employees and residents who rely on those jobs and services."